

NYC Coordinated Assessment and Placement System (CAPS)
First Year Evaluation of CAPS Survey

EVALUATION BRIEF

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Background

The Coordinated Assessment and Placement System (CAPS) is NYC's effort to streamline and improve homeless housing assessment, prioritization, and placement process—and to meet HUD's Coordinated Entry requirement. As part of this effort, in 2018 the Office of Customized Assistance Services (CAS) in the New York City Department of Social Services/Human Resources Administration (DSS/HRA) implemented the Coordinated Assessment Survey (CAPS survey). This report presents the DSS Office of Evaluation and Research (OER)'s evaluation of the first year of CAPS implementation, focusing on the initial 2018 roll-out experiences of the CAPS survey in DHS single adult assessment shelters.

NYC has six assessment shelters designed to shelter clients on a short-term basis (less than 21 days) while assessing them for placement in the appropriate type of program shelter. Beginning in late January 2018, all DHS single adult assessment shelters were required to complete a CAPS survey for everyone in shelter longer than 2 days. Moreover, for all single adult DHS shelters, safe havens, drop-in centers, and homeless outreach clients, a CAPS survey must be completed before a 2010e application is submitted.

OER's evaluation assesses the first year implementation of the CAPS survey across four main domains: 1) CAPS survey rates across the six shelters; 2) rates of potential eligibility for subsidized and supportive housing based on CAPS survey results; 3) 2010e completion rates for those deemed potentially eligible for supportive housing by the CAPS Survey, including 2010e outcomes in terms of eligibility, vulnerability, and early housing placement rates; and finally 4) stakeholder expectations and experiences during this initial rollout of the CAPS survey.

Methods

OER conducted a mixed-method implementation evaluation to explore the domains of interest identified above. OER linked administrative records from the DHS shelter system (CARES) to data from the CAPS survey and 2010e housing application system (PACT) to track outcomes for a study cohort. The study cohort included all clients with a 2+ day stay in any of the six DHS Single Adult Assessment Shelters from January 23, 2018, when the CAPS survey was first required, through December 2018. Qualitative data was collected through shelter site visits and key informant interviews to further explore and elucidate findings from the quantitative analysis. The CAPS Continuous System Improvement (CSI), Persons with Lived Experience, and Youth Action Board committees provided insights and guidance on identifying key informants and developing qualitative data collection tools.

Key Findings

During the CAPS survey roll-out period in 2018, 41 percent of all assessment shelter clients were surveyed. Rates varied by shelter, with shelters with lower rates of surveys tending to have higher rates of subsequent 2010e housing applications. This pattern may indicate that

certain shelters were particularly targeting the survey to clients who appeared likely in need of supportive housing. Thirty-eight percent of surveys were completed within 48 hours and roughly half in the first week, while the remaining 43 percent were completed later, often after clients had transitioned from assessment to program shelters. Survey respondents were slightly older than those who did not complete the survey. Men also completed the survey at higher rates than women, likely reflecting differences in operations at the men’s versus women’s assessment shelters.

As seen in Table 1, almost all respondents were eligible for some type of subsidized housing (95%), and 65 percent were eligible for at least one housing type *other than* NYCHA public housing or Housing Choice Voucher (HCV; i.e., Section 8) housing—both of which have broad eligibility, but long wait lists. As the numbers in Table 1 suggest, there was substantial overlap across housing results: 58 percent of respondents deemed potentially eligible for subsidized housing were also deemed potentially eligible for supportive housing. In interviews with shelter staff and other stakeholders, many stressed that housing eligibility is not the same as housing needs or wants, and perspectives varied regarding how to best guide clients who appeared eligible for both categories of housing.

Table 1: Types of Housing Option Results (Grouped) in CAPS Survey

	Assessment Shelters		All Other CAPS Surveys	
	#	% (n=7,958)	#	% (n=10,062)
Not Eligible for Any Housing	178	2.2%	160	1.6%
Subsidized Housing Combined*	7,729	97.1%	9,689	95.4%
Supportive Housing Combined**	4,518	56.8%	7,743	76.2%
2010e Housing Options Combined***	4,441	55.1%	7,559	75.1%

Source: Most recent CAPS survey from Sep 2017 to Jan 2019 for Single Adults with stays longer than 2 days in Assessment Shelters from Jan 23, 2018 to Dec 31, 2018 from CARES; “All Other CAPS Surveys” excludes Assessment Shelters. *Includes NYCHA, HCV, LINC I-VI, HPD Set Aside; **Includes Gen Pop, SMI, NY/NY I,II,III, NYC 15/15, VASH/SSVF, HASA; ***2010e application required for Gen Pop, SMI, NY/NY I, II, III, and NYC 15/15 housing.

Just over half (55%) of those surveyed were deemed likely-eligible for supportive housing via the 2010e application, and of those, 45 percent went on to complete a 2010e application (Table 2). Among these individuals, 77 percent were approved for supportive housing, and among the approved 2010e applications, 14 percent had a high SVA score. As of June 30, 2019, from this study cohort of 2018 CAPS survey respondents, 15 percent had been placed in 2010e housing tracked by the PACT system;¹ housing placements *not* tracked by PACT were not included in this analysis. Housing application and placement results did not differ by assessment shelter; however, women were more likely to apply for supportive housing

¹ 2010e application in the PACT system includes NY/NY I, II, and III, NYC 15/15, SMI, and Gen Pop supportive housing.

than men. Viewed by age, older adults who screened as likely 2010e eligible were more likely than young adults to subsequently apply: 30percent of adults ages 55+ completed a 2010e versus 23 percent of youth under age 26. Conversely, among these 2010e applicants, older adults were less likely to be approved for supportive housing than youth (73% v. 84%). Among those approved, there were no age differences in placement rates.

Table 2: Number and Percent of Assessment Shelter Residents with CAPS Survey and 2010e Application

	# (%)
<i>Total in Assessment Shelter 2018 2+ days</i>	19,214
Total Surveyed	7,958 (41%)
Total Surveyed with Supportive Housing Result*	4,441 (56%)
Total with Supportive Housing Result who Applied for 2010e**	1,992 (45%)

Source: Single Adults with stays longer than 2 days in Assessment Shelters from Jan 23 to Dec 31, 2018 from CARES matched to earliest CAPS survey from Sep 2017 to Jan 2019 and matched to most recent 2010e application in PACT from Jan 2018 to Jun 2019. *Only includes supportive housing available through the 2010e application, **Excludes anyone without a 2010e housing result in their CAPS survey.

Based on our interviews, shelters found the CAPS survey quick and easy, but they still reported a number of challenges with ensuring comprehensive survey completion. Barriers included: staffing and turnover, technical issues accessing the survey, client refusal (and an inability to account for such refusals), clients without an SSN or Medicaid CIN (CAPS requires at least one of these identifiers), and the general in-and-out, churning nature of assessment shelters, which made clients difficult to track down. Shelter leadership also noted that the lack of reporting on survey completion rates at their shelters made it difficult to monitor and enforce implementation. That said, staff felt that after initial challenges, they had worked the survey into their operations more seamlessly, suggesting that assessment shelter survey rates may have increased since the 2018 time period studied in this report.

Community stakeholders described several pros and cons between the operational implications of the two main purposes identified for the survey: 1) understanding housing needs broadly by surveying everyone at the “front door” of NYC homeless services, and 2) creating an engagement tool for staff to use to help clients obtain housing. To achieve the former, prioritizing implementation at assessment shelters makes sense, but for the latter, a focus on program shelters would be more useful.

Many assessment shelter staff similarly suggested that program shelters would be the more appropriate setting for requiring the survey, but responses were mixed. Assessment shelters found the greatest utility in the survey to be its prepopulated system data, including information about whether a client had a prior approved 2010e application, as well as its links to important client documents. This information was useful as staff sought to transition clients to the program shelter best suited to clients’ needs. In terms of the housing results,

most of the staff we interviewed in late 2019 reported that the survey results generally did not tell them anything they didn't know, and some spoke of the survey as synonymous with the 2010e housing application. However, staff also described the survey as a useful resource for new staff and explained that in some cases survey results provided helpful reinforcement for case workers' feedback in working with clients.

Recommendations

This report reflects early implementation experiences and all stakeholders emphasized that CAPS has been an iterative process. Many early findings were mitigated or obviated by the time the report was completed as technical issues were addressed and the survey was further integrated into shelter operations.

Overall, evaluation findings suggest that CAPS stakeholders should consider how to best prioritize the different survey purposes identified above and consider the pros and cons of each. Shifting the survey requirement from assessment to program shelters would allow the survey to be used more effectively as a client engagement tool. On the other hand, such a shift would mean that more individuals entering shelter would be missed (particularly those with short stays), and rehousing efforts could be delayed.

Regardless of selecting one approach, or both, additional training and supports will be valuable in promoting effective implementation. Important areas for staff training include guidance on the consent process, how to ask the survey questions, and how to review results with clients. Also important will be efforts to increase staff awareness of and access to both new and existing training resources. Other supports could include additional reporting on survey completion rates and outcomes for shelter leadership and DHS administrators, coupled with mechanisms to account for individuals who refuse the survey or are unable to complete it due to lack of an SSN.

Future evaluations of CAPS could focus on the City's efforts to prioritize and place households in housing. This includes assessing the impact of the By Name List (BNL), the Standardized Vulnerability Assessment (SVA), and the enhanced CAPS system scheduled to launch in October 2020 (which will allow for detailed tracking of vacant and occupied housing units) on who is housed and their housing stability. In addition, future evaluations could explore clients' experiences searching, applying, and interviewing for housing to inform implementation of CAPS.

Both DHS and HRA leadership emphasized a commitment to working collaboratively with the CAPS Steering Committee and CAPS Continuous Systems Improvement (CSI) Committees to further articulate the goals of the CAPS survey and the larger coordinated entry process; to understand the CAPS implementation experience across community stakeholders; to determine the most effective approaches to broader survey implementation; and to develop

and shape systems improvements (with related training and supports). This collaboration will include identifying the scope of future evaluations and will prioritize the perspectives of people with lived experience (PWLE) of homelessness on the CAPS process.